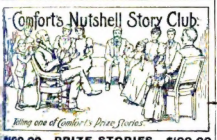




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THE SHEARS OF ATROPOS.
WRITTEN FOR COMFORT BY ANNIE ROSS MILLS.
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ATHER sat in the door-way during socks. A broad expanse of undulating country spread out before her. The gentle rolling hills, sprinkled with little pine trees, the fields of yellow corn, waving like dry and rustling leaves in a monotonous autumn song.

The cows were lazily grazing in the meadow opposite, now and then lifting their heads and making for a mellow "moo."

Father's gaze wandered wearily over the picture, and stopped on the little figure in the yard at the side of the house. Tim was not really much more than a baby, but he was a sturdy little fellow though only four years old.

Armed with a large shovel, he was digging in the little plot of ground he called his "garden."

A black dog lay beside him, and with his hat pushed back on a mass of tangled flaxen curls, he was working like a man, now dragging the heavy rake unaided over the rough ground, then lifting the shovel and trying to balance his little feet upon it as he had seen the men do. Now and then he would turn his smiling face towards his mother, and the answering light that shone on her own, told what was the joy of her life.

At last, weary of work and play, he ran to his mother's feet, and sitting down on the steps, laid his head against her knee for a few moments, then lifting it suddenly he looked over the front of the house. It was an ugly frame cottage of a dingy brown, new enough to have none of the dignity of age, even when in freshness and to be need of paint. No effort was made at adornment, and there was a discouraged look about everything, as if there was no heart or interest in aught about the home.

"Mamma," said Tim, solemnly, "do you know what I'd like to do when I'm bigger?"

"No," said Esther, "what?"

"I'm going to build you a nice house. Where does you want to have it?"

Esther's thoughts flew back to her childhood's home, where she had been so happy. Oh, so happy, and she dreamily answered, "In a two-sex, dear."

"Well," pursued Tim, "it's don't do be pretty, too. I'll make a barn and put two ponies in it, and I'll take you to ride with 'em, an' I'll drive, and when we do home, you'll sit in a nice velvet cushion chair and we'll see, an' den we'll have supper, some bistin, an' jelly, an' milk, an' ice cream, an' won't we have a good time!"

She looked at him curiously for a minute, and then asked, "And where will papa be?"

His face clouded an instant, then he whispered, "I'd miss papa!" he dead then."

Just then the gate creaked, and a tall man came quickly up the path. A brisk looking young mechanic, in his working clothes. No marks of dissipation visible, and the face, shaded by a shock of dark wavy hair, with deep blue eyes, might have been called handsome by some; but to a student of character, the heavy under lip, the line between the brows, and the drop of the corners of the mouth bespoke an arduous life. If not cruel, temper, and obstinacy joined with a coarse nature.

"Hello, Esther!" he called as he reached the steps. The child raised his eyes questioning and looked in his father's face, but without speaking another word, the man entered the house. The bright expression faded from the boy's face, and he murmured sadly, "Papadon't know me yet."

Esther heard it, and the color mounted slowly in her face. She set her teeth, and instant, then leaning down, she threw her arms around the child and kissed him with an impetuosity that was almost fierce in its sudden force, and said, "Now go and play till I get supper ready." She carefully turned the sock, pulling the toe down through the hole, then putting the two heels together, made them into a smooth little roll and laid them leisurely in her work basket beside the others, and striking the needle into the cushion, she carried the basket into the house.

The kitchen was sparsely clean but there was no attempt at decoration. Esther herself, in a blue cotton dress, was as distinctly tidy as any woman. With head erect and straight as an arrow she moved about the room. You could tell at a glance, a woman who would do her duty severely and keep the letter of the law, but beyond that there were no soft winning ways. The face was a pretty one, but immobile as a statue in its whole fairness. It seemed as if the joy of living had been crushed out, and a beautiful perfect machine left. Her hands showed the marks of hard toil and you could see that she shirked nothing of the labor of the house. The kettle was boiling briskly, and she put the tea in the pot and set it on the back of the stove. The wash, which was already put to get the spider, was soon "cammed over the fire. It only took a minute to toast the bread, and the apple sauce was on the table.

Her husband was sitting in the doorway now, with the penny evening paper, and now and then an occasional line aloud for her benefit, or laughing loudly over some campaign joke; for election was near at hand.

"I'm going to the rally to-night," he volunteered. "All the hands will be there; they mean to make the town go license this year anyway. 'Twill be a big time I reckon, for they'll have to fight for it."

"And do you want license too?" she asked.

The question did not trouble her. John had never been a drinking man. That was not one of her worries.

"Well, no, I don't care about it for myself, the boys will all the fellows to vote their way, but I'd rather go with the boss; he's always treated me well and I get good pay; he knows what's best for the town just as well as I do. I guess it's just as good to put my way, but I'm going all the same to see the fun."

"Come, your supper's ready," said Esther, and then she stepped to the door and called in the child.

John was generally rather a taciturn even every man, but to-night his tongue seemed loosed, and he talked about affairs in the shop, the growth of the business, which was a new one, and what his prospects were.

At each pause Tim was ready with some question for his mother, but he never addressed his father. Esther tried to keep him quiet with a restraining touch on his arm, but John impatiently cried out: "Keep your child still or I won't have him at the table."

She flashed a quick look of anger at him which died out as it came, but she only said: "He don't trouble you much anyway, seems to me."

Soon after the meal was over he took his hat from the nail behind the door and started out. When he had left the house, Esther threw down her dish towel and catching the child in her arms, she clasped him to her heart while she burst into a fit of hysterical weeping. His loving little arm was round her neck, and a soft little hand patted her cheek.

"I love you, mamma, don't cry," said the sweet voice in her ear; and she was calmed and went back to her work. This was soon done and everything left in its accustomed order for the night, with the table laid for breakfast, which would be soon after six when the factory whistle blew.

Now came her happiest hour of the day. Tim climbed in her lap and while she gently rocked him they had a little talk and he said his prayers. Then she put him to bed. John generally walked out after supper so she was alone with the child for awhile.

"How long to wait the king?" demanded he, and the baby voice followed her own in "What does little birdie say?" always half a line behind, struggling for name and words. "Now the yiver," and again he took up the familiar old refrain, "Yes we'll dance at the yiver, bifurful, bifurful, yiver." Then the eyelids grew heavy and with a sleepy little yawn he cuddled down on her arm.

"We'll say prayers now," said the mother. "Oh yes, I want to say the last one. 'Blessed be the man that waiteth not in a tunic and anglo-ry.'"

Then he stopped, "That's naughty folks, goes and says we've, no, likes 'em." Now let's say the dress makers one."

"But I don't know anything about dress makers, do you mean, Miss Conly across the street?"

"Yes, you know too, you told me one day. 'Blessed—then he thought a moment—'Yes, yes, the dress makers with the pieces, for they are children of God.'"

Esther buried her face in the soft curls, she could contain the smile that would come.

then she tucked him to sleep in his crib with a downy kiss, but as she turned away the tiny hand caught her own and drew her back, while he whispered, "Oh, do these papa'll know me to-morrow?"

Esther turned wearily away and descended the stairs, when she began nervously pacing the room.

Her thoughts turned backward only six short years when she was a merry girl; only six years, but how long they had seemed. How before that was a different existence. How proud she was of the young lover who came from a distant town to woo her. She smiled bitterly as she thought, what chance had in those brief meetings to learn to know him or his disposition. Frank and winning he appeared then to her. Her father's warning words sounded again in her ear. He had discerned more truly than she. "I am afraid, child, you ain't suited to him, I dread ye won't be happy, but if ye love him I won't stand in your way." Yes, she had married without a doubt and gone to her new home filled with pride in her handsome young husband, and with never a foreboding that she should ever lose his affection.

For a few brief months she believed in his love for her, then came the awakening. He had loved her for her pretty face and bright attractions. She might acknowledge that much without vanity now, since it was all he had cared for. She had grown up through girlhood with a common school education, and her father was an illiterate, uncultured man of narrow means, but still with a natural appreciation of the true and beautiful, united to a great love of nature, so her surroundings had been congenial and without any great aspirations beyond her station, she was still far above her husband.

When the sweet little flower of humanity lay in her arms, she was satisfied, and once again life stretched before her filled with joyous promise, but as she lifted the corner of the blanket and joyfully asked, "Isn't he a beautiful boy, John, our son?" his face fell, and in a swift tone he said, "I don't like children any too well, and I hate boys; I suppose I could stand a girl, I always liked girls," and he turned on his heel and left the room. Never from that day through these four dreary years had he ever spoken to her, but she knew the slightest motion he made to criticize.

Esther clasped her hands over her head and then herself upon the carpet lounge in an agony of despair. How long could she bear it? Every day it grew harder and harder, for now the difference between the way other fathers treated their children and his father's neglect of him, had made its way into the precious child's brain, and though he seldom spoke directly to his father, his occasional questions were so many dagger stabs to the tender mother's heart.

"My darling, my darling," she murmured, "what can I do? Is my fault? Have I failed in my duty to you?" Then conscience turned to reproach her of not trying sufficiently to win the father and soften his heart toward the child. Since they had left their pretty father's home, she had not loved the other man, and it had been a bitter wrench to leave it because John had said there was a better chance for him to get ahead there. She had

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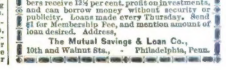
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A HORRIBLE SCENE.

TRY FOR COMFORT BY HENRY HARRISON.
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SEVERAL years ago, a friend and myself, who were on a bicycle tour, were riding along a road, and I saw a man sitting on a bench, looking very sad.

"What is the matter with you?" I asked him. "I am very sad," he replied. "I have lost my wife and child, and I am now alone in the world."

"I am so glad to hear of it," I said. "I have just lost my wife and child, and I am now alone in the world."

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He told me that he had been married for twenty years, and that he had a family of five children. He said that he had been very happy, but that he had lost his wife and child, and that he was now alone in the world.

"I am so glad to hear of it," I said. "I have just lost my wife and child, and I am now alone in the world."

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